

# South African political economy after Marikana

By Patrick Bond

When a ruling party in any African country sinks to the depths of allowing its police force to serve white-dominated multinational capital by killing dozens of black workers so as to end a brief strike, as happened in South Africa in August, it represents not just human-rights and labour-relations travesties. The incident offers the potential for a deep political rethink. But that can only happen if the society openly confronts the chilling lessons learned in the process about the moral degeneration of a liberation movement that the world had supported for decades. Support was near universal from progressives of all political hues, because that movement, the African National Congress (ANC), promised to rid this land not only of formal apartheid but of all unfair racial inequality and indeed class and gender exploitation as well. And now the ANC seems to be making many things worse.



There are five immediate considerations about what happened at Marikana, 100km northwest of Johannesburg, beginning around 4pm on August 16:

- South African police ordered several thousand striking platinum mineworkers – rock drill operators – off a hill where they had gathered as usual over the prior four days, surrounding the workers with barbed wire;
- the hill was more than a kilometer away from Lonmin property, the mineworkers were not blocking mining operations or any other facility, and although they were on an ‘unprotected’ wildcat strike, the workers had a constitutional right to gather;
- as they left the hill, 34 were killed and 78 others suffered bullet-wound injuries, all at the hands of police weapons, leaving some crippled for life, with 10 of the 34 shot dead while moving through a small gap in the fencing, and the other two dozen murdered – some apparently by police shooting from helicopters – in a field and on a smaller hill nearby, as they fled;
- no police were hurt in the operation;
- 270 mine workers were arrested that day, followed by a weekend during which state prosecutors charged the men with the ‘murder’ of their colleagues (under an obscure apartheid-era doctrine of collective responsibility), followed by an embarrassed climb down by the national prosecutor apparently under pressure from the minister of justice, as well as by most of the rest of South African society.



The details about how the massacre unfolded were not initially obvious, for mainstream media embedded behind police lines (unaware at the time of the ‘killing kopje’) and official police statements together generated a ‘fog of war’, former Intelligence Minister Ronnie Kasrils remarked. The effect was to stigmatize the mineworkers. It was only a few days later that observers – the September Imbizo Commission, University of Johannesburg researcher Peter Alexander and his research team, and *Daily Maverick* reporter Greg Marinovich – uncovered the other shootings. The *Daily Maverick* stood out for subsequently getting to the scene of the crime most often and with the most insightful reporters. Most journalists relied on official sources, especially the police and National Prosecuting Authority, even when they were discredited by persistent fibbery.

Media bias allowed the impression to emerge in conventional wisdom that police were ‘under attack’ by irrational, drugged and potentially murderous men from rural areas in the Eastern Cape’s Pondoland, Lesotho and Mozambique, who used ‘muti’ (traditional medicine) to ward off bullets. Plenty of press reports and even the SA Communist Party’s (SACP’s) official statement refer to the workers’ pre-capitalist spiritual sensibilities, to try to explain why they might charge towards the police, through the five-meter gap in the barbed wire, with their primitive spears and wooden sticks.

It is actually far more likely that as the men came through the gap, they began edging alongside the fence, rather than running directly at the line of heavily armed police. Reports that a mineworker fired the first shot have not been confirmed. The police claim six handguns were recovered from dead, wounded and arrested mineworkers, but this also awaits verification. Although on August 17, President Jacob Zuma left a regional leadership summit a day early, he took a week to see how the dust would settle, and then called for an

official commission of enquiry to hold hearings, which was begun six weeks later though without sufficient preparation to ensure the victims' families were in attendance.



There is, of course, much more context to add, both short- and long-term. The next layer of complexity relates to the prior murders of six workers, two security guards and two cops close by, starting when a march on August 11 by striking workers against the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was met with gunfire, allegedly from NUM officials. Tension in the area mounted quickly, and when security guards and police were killed, apparently by some of the Marikana mineworkers, this generated a sensibility of vindication; gruesome footage of the murdered cops had circulated amongst the police who were on duty on August 16. The assassination of NUM shopstewards increased in pace, as well.

But it must be recalled that this was not brand new conflict, for strike-related violence over the prior year at Lonmin and other major platinum mining operations killed many other workers, and just six months earlier, 17 000 mineworkers were temporarily fired nearby at the world's second-largest platinum firm, Implats, before gaining wage concessions, leaving more than 50 dead. Still, none of this labour-capital conflict would have flared into such an explosive situation at Marikana, many believe, were it not for the obsequious state, ruling party and trade union relationships that developed over the prior two decades with the major mining houses. These cozy relations, even with companies with very low morals and

engaged in labour broking, apparently incensed the workers, raising their staying power to such high levels.

### **The official investigation**

The massacre was so violent an assault on the society's sensibilities that Zuma had to sound some notes of regret. On August 17, he announced a judicial commission of inquiry's terms of reference. Along with hints that as punishment, Lonmin's mining licenses might be revoked, Zuma went slightly beyond the tight focus that many expected, i.e., who shot whom on whose orders under what psychological conditions. Marikana is such an all-consuming disaster that Zuma may even go beyond the usual superficial and inconsequential tut-tutting, and impose sharp punishment on Lonmin so as to redirect the heat his own government is justifiably feeling. Zuma has asked the three judges (none of whom have a high public profile or obvious biases) several questions which the society is screaming out to be answered:

- How did Lonmin try to resolve disputes with labour and between unions, and react to violence at the mine prior to the August 16 shootings? The brief is to 'also examine Lonmin policies generally, including the procedure, practices and conduct relating to its employees and organised labour.' While notably absent is an explicit mandate to look at the broader impact of Lonmin as a Resource-Cursing company – including apparently having local police in the company's pocket to do its very dirty strike-busting work – the three commissioners can nevertheless broaden out to 'investigate whether by act or omission, the company directly or indirectly caused loss of life or damage to persons or property.' That could be a long leash, if the judges feel like a longer run (SA judges normally don't).
- Why did the SA Police Service use 'force and whether this was reasonable and justifiable'?
- What about 'the conduct of the National Union of Mineworkers and the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union', and was there 'effective control over membership... in ensuring that their conduct was lawful'?
- Did the Department of Mineral Resources or any other government department act appropriately?
- What of 'the conduct of individuals and loose groupings in fomenting and/or promoting a situation of conflict and confrontation'?

The society's cleavages are so deep and wide that the commission's work, no matter the quality of its immediate answers, cannot band-aid vast differences of opinion or establish the basis for appropriate political mobilization. Cosatu recognized that further structural factors should be considered, and like the SA Human Rights Commission and independent progressive investigators including Bench Marks Foundation, will issue major reports in coming weeks.

### **Corporate-state-labour sweethearts**

Lonmin was long ruled by Tiny Rowland, a man so venal that his London and Rhodesia Company was named 'the unacceptable face of capitalism' by British prime minister Edward Heath in 1973 after just one episode of his bribery and bullying was unveiled. Rowland died in 1998, after losing control of the company five years earlier due to his ties to Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi. Lonmin rebranded – its 'Integrity, Honesty & Trust' slogan adorns billboards at Marikana – and by 2010 the firm's 'Sustainable Development Report' was ranked 'excellent' by Ernst and Young. Lonmin is even featured on the World Bank's website as the leading example of International Finance Corporation (IFC) 'strategic community investment,' worthy of a 2007 Bank commitment of \$150 million in equity investment and credit. (Exactly two weeks after the massacre, the new Bank president Jim Yong Kim came to Pretoria and Johannesburg for a visit. Tellingly, he neglected to check on his Lonmin investment in nearby Marikana, and instead gave a high-profile endorsement to an IFC deal with a small junk-mail printing/posting firm that is prospering from state tenders.)



Lonmin must also have been confident that with the World Bank backing its community investment gimmickry, it could mainly ignore the nearby Nkaneng shack-settlement's degradation. The lack of clean running water, sanitation, storm-water drainage, electricity, schools, clinics and any other amenities make Nkaneng as inhospitable a residential site to reproduce labour power as any other in South Africa, yet Lonmin's approach to the community's troubles was tokenistic. Instead of building decent company housing for migrant workers, for example, it paid an inadequate 'living out allowance' to support rental payments in shacks, a sum of around \$200 per month, which was in many cases just added to wages for remittance to the home region, leaving Nkaneng nearly uninhabitable.

Lonmin's successful public relations onslaught probably gave its executives confidence that long-standing abuse of low-paid migrant labour could continue. The primary trade union serving black workers, NUM, becoming so coopted that shop stewards are reportedly paid three times more than ordinary workers, and NUM general secretary Frans Baleni earns \$160 000 per year. Baleni had even advised Lonmin to fire 9000 mineworkers at nearby Karee mine in late 2011, because they went on a wildcat strike. As Baleni's former deputy, Archie Palane put it, 'It's absolutely shocking – completely unheard of that a union advises an employer to fire workers. No matter what your differences or what they did, this should simply not happen. It gives the impression that you just don't care. How can you ever expect those workers to trust you to represent them in any negotiations?' Of the 9000, 7000 were rehired but they quit NUM and joined the rival Association of Mining and Construction Union (AMCU). One result, at nearby Implats, was that of the 28 000 workers, 70 percent were NUM members in late 2011, but by September 2012 the ratio was down to 13 percent.

On the ecological front, the entire platinum belt contributes to the toxicity and overall pollution that means South Africa's 'Environmental Performance Index' has slipped to 5<sup>th</sup> worst of 133 countries surveyed by Columbia and Yale University researchers this year. The Mineral Energy Complex's prolific contribution to pollution is mainly to blame, including coal mining that generates coal-fired power used in electricity-intensive mining operations. In this context, Lonmin might have considered its ongoing destruction of the platinum belt's water, air, agricultural and other eco-systems of little importance, within a setting in which pollution is ubiquitous.

Moreover, the North West provincial and Rustenburg municipal governments are apparently rife with corruption. Emblematic was the 2009 assassination of a well-known ANC whistleblower, Moss Phakoe, which a judge found was arranged by Rustenburg mayor Matthew Wolmarans. Again, in this context, Lonmin and the other big mining houses in the platinum belt might have considered South Africa just one more Third World site worthy of the designation Resource Cursed. The phrase is usually applied to sites where dictatorial and familial patronage relations allow multinational capital in the extractive industries to get away with murder. (Around two dozen anti-corruption whistleblowers like Phakoe have been killed in recent years.)

Family enterprise suits the Zumas, who have a reported 220 businesses. It is not surprising to learn that Zuma's son Duduzane is co-owner of JIC, the platinum belt region's largest firm specializing in short-term labour outsourcing (sometimes called 'labour broking', though JIC denies this, and NUM has a recognition agreement with the firm). Nor is it a secret that the president's nephew Khulubuse Zuma plays a destructive role in nearby gold-mining territory as Aurora co-owner, along with Nelson Mandela's grandson and Zuma's lawyer. That mining house has perhaps the single most extreme record of ecological destructiveness and labour conflict in the post-apartheid era, reflecting how white-owned mining houses gave used-up mines with vast Acid Mine Drainage liabilities to new black owners, who are ill equipped to deal with the inevitable crises.

This is all part of the deracialisation of apartheid capitalism. As *Business Day* editor Peter Bruce wrote in 2003, 'The government is utterly seduced by big business, and cannot see beyond its immediate interests.' Those interests were to facilitate capital accumulation – 'we must strive to create and strengthen a black capitalist class', said Zuma's predecessor Thabo Mbeki, upon taking over from Mandela in 1999 – within the ANC's leading political power blocs, along with power of patronage to ensure voting majorities into the indefinite future. To illustrate, the ANC's investment arm, Chancellor House, has done notorious deals including buying into Hitachi for supply of boilers to the vast coal-fired power plant now under construction not far from Marikana, at Medupi.

The World Bank made its largest-ever project loan to support that deal, and with Eskom chair Valli Moosa also a member of the ANC Finance Committee at the time, the SA Public Protector labeled his conflict of interest 'improper'. But reflecting the balance of political power and financial facilitation by Robert Zoellick's World Bank, the deal went through and now more than two years of delays can be blamed, not surprisingly, on faulty boilers. (The day that Jim Kim arrived in Johannesburg, several hundred Medupi construction workers embarked on a strike that included burning some of the facilities, resulting in the evacuation of 17 000 workers, a problem that did not attract his extensive public commentary while in the country or on his blog upon returning.)

How much has the ANC been seduced by big business? After the era of Albert Luthuli – Nobel Peace Prize winner in 1960 – its standard bearers over the next third of a century were Oliver Tambo, in exile for all but the last three years of his life, and Nelson Mandela who remained ANC president until 1997 and state president until 1999. The party was

never pure, with rot evident to those in the know. As one example of the old guard's ways, in the late 1990s, defense minister Joe Modise apparently arranged for large parts of the hugely expensive arms deal to benefit himself and allies via straight bribery. Mandela and Finance Minister Trevor Manuel looked the other way.

One man who lubricated the process of corrupting the ANC was Rowland, formerly a member of Hitler Youth in Hamburg, and then mainly schooled in England. After a World War II internment due to his German background, he was a porter in London's Euston station but by migrating to what was then Southern Rhodesia, Rowland made his wealth in tobacco and rose rapidly within that colony's racist business environment. After taking control of Lonrho, from the early 1960s he became a leading confidante to a succession of African dictators as well as liberation strugglers, including Zimbabwe's. It was from these sorts of leaders and their countries' natural resources, railroads and newspapers that he extracted a vast fortune for his tightly controlled firm. Rowland's accomplishments included platinum trading to help bust apartheid-era sanctions against South Africa, for which he perhaps made amends by flying Tambo around in a jet and buying him a mansion in one of Johannesburg's most fashionable white suburbs, Sandhurst. He was given the Order of Good Hope award, South Africa's most prestigious honour, in 1996, and died in 1998.

Mandela, too, was showered with a small financial fortune by friendly tycoons after release from 27 years of prison in 1990, sufficient to soon amass a \$10 million asset base, as revealed in his ugly divorce proceedings with Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. It is not known whether and how the gifts influenced Mandela, and whether he used his world-historic prestige on behalf of benefactors. But as one illustration, the donation of \$25 million from the Indonesian dictator Suharto to the ANC's 1994 election campaign may explain Mandela's award of the Order of Good Hope medal to that tyrant in 1997, a few weeks before popular protests forced him to flee Jakarta.

This venality by the democratic fathers may seem sufficiently disheartening to provoke South Africans to political depression and apathy, but somehow Marikana has changed so many calculations that the next layer of complexity must be confronted head on: revulsion by workers and community residents against the ANC, NUM and SACP. These organisations still describe themselves as 'the progressive forces' aiming to move the 'National Democratic Revolution' to the next 'phase', i.e. economic justice. But this is classical 'talk left' in order to 'walk right', such as the persistent appeals by NUM for 'stability' in the 'fragile' mining sector. Actually, the nine main mining firms recorded \$4.5 billion in 2011 profits from their SA operations. Not fooled any longer, workers are showing signs of ungovernability, moving by tens of thousands from NUM affiliation to the rival AMCU.

Even after the massacre, the Marikana workers refused to return to their rock drilling jobs until they received a massive wage increase. With the intervention of the SA Council of Churches (especially the Anglican Bishop of Pretoria Jo Seoka), the Lonmin workers won 22 percent after a month's strike, and that was only agreed upon after they were snookered into thinking a higher wage is on the cards next year. In turn, this generated contagion of such confidence that nearly one in five other South African mineworkers quickly embarked

upon wildcat strikes, leading in many cases to their own substantial above-inflation pay hikes. Similar militancy was soon evident in trucking, the auto sector, municipal labour and other sectors. What, then, does this disaster of rising worker confidence mean politically, for the future of Alliance politics and corporatism?



### **The Marikana massacre’s historical metaphors and political lessons**

How long can the amazing upsurge of class struggle in South Africa go on? Living here 22 years, I’ve never witnessed such a period of vibrant, explosive, but uncoordinated worker militancy. The latest news from the labour front is that 12 000 workers were fired on October 12 by Angloplats for a wildcat strike (it is likely most will be rehired in coming days if an above-inflation wage settlement is reached), and thousands of others are threatened by the mining houses. Jacob Zuma’s government is panicking about lost elite legitimacy, calling on October 17 for a pay freeze for top private sector, parastatal and state management to make a token gesture at addressing unemployment.

As the ANC, Cosatu and SACP continuously fail to put a lid on the boiling labour pot, and as threatened mass firings of wildcat-striking workers by mining houses ratchets up the tension, no one can offer sure predictions. To try, nevertheless, to assess the durability of this surge of working class revulsion, now two months after the August 16 Marikana Massacre of 34 wildcat-striking platinum mineworkers (plus 78 wounded), requires sifting through the various ideological biases that have surfaced in the commentariat, as well as first considering precedents. How much can the balance of forces be shifted if the ruling elite overplay their hand – and what organizational forms are needed to prevent divide-and-conquer of the forces gathering from below?

### **Metaphors for Marikana from the bad old days**

We must be wary of drawing a comparison to the South African state’s last mineworker massacre, in 1922 when Johannesburg’s white goldminers rebelled against the increasing use of competing black labour (to the sound of the Communist Party of South Africa’s notorious slogan, ‘Workers of the World Unite for a White South Africa!’). They were



resoundingly defeated and then coopted, a fate that Marikana workers and 100 000 others who went wildcat in recent weeks have so far avoided. Those workers are now moving by the tens of thousands from Cosatu affiliates to upstart – albeit economic, wages-oriented and openly apolitical – unions like the Association of Mining and Construction Union (AMCU), predictably labeled by tired ANC Alliance hacks as the new ‘counter-revolutionaries’.

The aftermaths of more recent political massacres may have more to teach us. After March 21, 1960 at Sharpeville, where 69 were shot dead for burning the apartheid regime’s racist passbooks an hour’s drive south of Johannesburg, there was an immediate downswing in mass-resistance politics, followed by a hapless turn to armed struggle and the shift of resources and personnel to ineffectual exile-based liberation movements. It was not until 1973 that mass-based organizing resumed, starting in the Durban dockyards with resurgent trade unionism.

The next big apartheid massacre was in June 1976 when in Soweto as many as 1000 school children were murdered by the police and army for resisting the teaching of Afrikaans and taking to the streets. In the 1980s and early 1990s, there were periodic massacres by men who apparently fused ethnic interests of migrant workers (mainly from KwaZulu) to the Inkatha Freedom Party and the regime’s ‘Third Force’ provocateurs. But that era’s most comparable event to Marikana was the Bisho Massacre in which 28 were shot dead by a Bantustan army at the conclusion of a march in the Eastern Cape’s Ciskei homeland.

In 1960, the effect of the killings was first desperation and then more than a decade of quiescence. In 1976, the Soweto uprising put South Africa on the world solidarity map and along with liberation movement victories in Mozambique, Angola and then Zimbabwe, kickstarted other communities, workers, women and youth into the action-packed 1980s. In 1992, the revulsion from what happened at Bisho followed by Chris Hani’s assassination in April 1993 were the catalysts to finally set the April 1994 date for the first one-person one-vote election. Is there a historical analogy to pursue?

In other words, if today’s struggle is against what might be termed class apartheid, then is the disparate resistance signified by Marikana similar to the early 1960s and hence will there be much more repression before a coherent opposition emerges? Or will the contagion of protest from this and thousands of other micro-protests across the country start to coagulate, as in the 1976-94 period, into a network similar to the United Democratic Front (implying an inevitable split in the ANC-Cosatu-SACP Alliance, led by genuine communists and progressive post-nationalist workers), and then the formation of Worker’s Party to challenge ANC electoral dominance?

Or, might something happen quite suddenly to rearrange power relations, as in 1992, and as we saw in Egypt in the wake of independent labour organizing against state-corporate-trade union arrangements in the years prior to the massive Tahrir Square mobilizations in early 2011? ‘Tunisia Day’ for South Africa could come in 2020, according to high-profile commentator Moeletsi Mbeki (younger brother of the former president). But if the strike wave continues to build and if capital insists the state put its foot down on the workers,

aided by sweetheart unions, as the Cosatu-affiliated National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) is now known, things may come to a head sooner. On October 17, Zuma's remarks about the need to 'get back to work' had an ominous sound, and the next day the Marikana workers went on another wildcat strike because the police moved in to the platinum mine once again, arresting a few central leaders.

### **Fractured political certainties**

Endless debates about these matters are underway, especially between the centre-left unionists and communists who are close to official power and thus defensive of the political *status quo*, on the one hand; and on the other, critical, independent progressives (my own bias). Overlaying the crisis and these debates is the internal ANC split between pro- and anti-Zuma forces, which spilled over into Cosatu prior to its September congress. It was this that initially paralysed labour leadership, given the danger Cosatu would unleash centrifugal forces that its popular, leftist leader Zwelinzima Vavi could not control. There was even talk of NUM opening up a leadership challenge to Vavi, on grounds that the 300 000-member union (Cosatu's largest single member) was strongly pro-Zuma and insisted on the official Cosatu support that Vavi had initially resisted.

Until September, Zuma did indeed appear vulnerable to an ANC leadership challenge, but by ensuring the support of NUM and other unions, as well as a huge increase in membership in his home province of KwaZulu-Natal, he appears certain to win re-election as ANC president at the party's congress in December. Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe has been publicly vague on whether he will challenge Zuma, but recent events ironically strengthened the current configuration of personalities, as major blocs all sought stability – drawing the wagons around in a 'laager', is the local Afrikaans metaphor – on a terrain of such socio-political turmoil.

In the meantime, this political maneuvering left Cosatu mostly silenced about Marikana, as NUM's weight and the parallel subversion of other union leaders made it too difficult for the federation to visibly back the upstart platinum, gold and other mineworkers. In any case, what these wildcat strikers were doing might, unionists reckoned, even throw the institutions of centralised bargaining into chaos. The demand for higher wages was both extreme, and thus opposed by NUM, and ultimately successful in the case of Marikana's courageous workers. The 22 percent raise – at a time inflation is around 6 percent – they won after a month of striking was remarkable, and inspired the country's labour force to look at their own pay packets askance.

By failing to issue immediate statements about Marikana, much less mobilise workers for solidarity against multinational capital's and the state's onslaught, Cosatu was simply unable to intervene at a time so many cried out for a shift from the War of Position to a War of Movement. Before Marikana, there was a chance Vavi would have been replaced by forces to his right, driven by NUM, but because he chose to close ranks, he won re-election as general secretary, building on a successful term over the past 13 years in which more than any other figure in South African society, he has vocally demanded economic justice – until Marikana. Indeed Vavi's most conspicuous moves throughout the mining belt in

subsequent weeks were out of character: hand-in-hand with NUM's leadership, using his enormous prestige to throw cold water on the workers.

Overall, the configuration has Cosatu gazing upwards longingly for a relationship with state power, as with labour's support for Zuma even during the darkest 2005-07 days of corruption and rape charges. Many on the left are convinced, now, that Cosatu's conservatism is the principal barrier to progress. I wish this was not so, but find it hard to rebut.

The resulting void is vast. Only the so-called populist hypocrite Julius Malema, the ANC's former youth leader who is himself allegedly implicated in corrupt 'tenderpreneurship' (insider deals for state contracts) in the neighbouring province of Limpopo, could gather 15 000 people at Marikana two days after the massacre. There he voiced the needed critique of Zuma, Lonmin and their associated black-parasitical capitalists, such as Lonmin part-owner Cyril Ramaphosa, who had just offered \$240 000 of his company's funds to bury the murdered strikers, but whose company Shanduka is paid \$360 000/year by Lonmin for providing 'empowerment' consulting.

The billionaire Ramaphosa's recent attempt to purchase a prize bull cow for \$2.3 million was mentioned by Malema as indicative of the gulf between the new South African 1% and the workers. Malema was rewarded by overwhelming support from Marikana miners on two occasions – including a memorial ceremony he arranged, at which he kicked out several of Zuma's cabinet ministers who had come to pay respects – but on his third visit, police denied him his constitutional rights to address another huge crowd. Even while contesting fraud charges in his home base, where facilitating provincial tenders made him rich, Malema has been an unstoppable force across the mining belt in North West and Limpopo Provinces, and even Zimbabwe, calling for radical redistribution. Each time he does so, it seems to pull Zuma's rhetoric marginally leftwards as well.

### **Rebuilding from micropolitics**

But the forces for genuine change have to be gathered from below, for Malema's agenda is still apparently a reentry to the ANC, from which he was recently expelled for pulling the party into disrepute. Instead, the labour and community activists at the base need our attention, for to exist in Marikana and these mining dorpies is to face incessant repression bordering on brutality. Police arrogance continues undisturbed by the hatred expressed by workers and the disgust of so many in the society.

For example, the emergence of a women's mutual-aid movement amongst mineworker wives and girlfriends, as well as other women from the impoverished Marikana community, is one reflection of a new bottom-up politics. At least one martyr emerged from their ranks: Paulina Masuhlo, an unusually sympatico ANC municipal councilor in Marikana who sided with the workers and who was shot in the abdomen and leg with rubber bullets during a police and army invasion of Nkaneng on August 25. She died of the wounds on August 30. Yet for the following week and a half, police and malevolently bureaucratic municipal officials refused the women's attempts to memorialize Masuhlo with a long

protest march from Nkaneng to the Marikana police station. Persistence and legal support prevailed, so 800 demanded justice in a women's-only trek from Nkaneng to Marikana police station on September 1, dignified and without casualties.



But the political opportunities that might fuse worker, community and women's interests in improving conditions for the reproduction of labour power – perhaps one day too joined by environmentalists – are fragile and easy to lose. Male migrant workers typically maintain two households and hence channel resources back to the Eastern Cape, Lesotho, Mozambique and other home bases. This process of mixing short-term residents with long-term Tswana-speaking inhabitants is fraught with potential xenophobia and ethnicism, and is a site in which syndicates of illicit drugs, transactional sex (even forced sexual labour), traditional patriarchy, dysfunctional spiritual suspicions (e.g. the use of traditional medicine *muti* against bullets which allegedly wears off quickly in the presence of women), widespread labour-broking and other super-exploitative relations thrive.

As a result, it can be extremely expensive to swim within this sea of poverty. For example, reflecting the broader financialization of South Africa's economy since the early 2000s, microfinance short-term loans that carry exceptionally high interest rates are offered to mineworkers by institutions ranging from established banks – one (Ubank) even co-owned by NUM and another (Capitec) replete with powerful ANC patrons – down to fly-by-night 'mashonisha' loan sharks. The extremely high interest rates charged, especially once arrears mount, are understood to be one of the central pressures requiring workers to demand higher wages.

New versions of a debt moratorium or organized debtor's cartel – such as the 'bond boycott' strategies that were so common in the early 1990s, in which borrowers banded together to gain strength for collective defaults – are a logical progression for a micropolitics of resistance in Marikana and so many other similar situations. The 'repo man' tends to resort to threats and practices of violence, of course, so this is not a decision

to be taken lightly (in Mexico in early 1995, it took a jump in interest rates from 14 to 120 percent to catalyse the 'El Barzon' – the yoke – movement which gathered a million members to renegotiate debts on the basis of the financial reality, 'Can't pay, won't pay!')

Jumping scale to other visions of post-exploitative economics, there is also loose talk of nationalization, of which Mining Minister Susan Shabangu and her pro-business allies have been attempting to rid the ANC, especially since Malema's troubles rose to crisis proportions. The expulsion of the ANC Youth League faux-radicals left virtually no major figures aside from the general secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, Irvin Jim, to demand nationalisation of strategic resources – even though it was a policy position adopted just weeks earlier at an ANC national policy conference.

Nationalising platinum would be a smart move, for South Africa controls more than 80 percent of world platinum resources, and the price spike occasioned by the Lonmin, Implats and Angloplats strikes – now 30 percent over six weeks – suggests great potential for a platinum cartel similar to OPEC's oil cartel. The main buyer of platinum is the European auto industry, so while the economic crisis continues, demand will remain soft, with the consequent threat that the major platinum mines will simply close shafts. The same week that Lonmin conceded the big wage increase to the 4000 Marikana rock drill operators, it found it could cancel short-term contracts of another 1200 workers, for example.

### **Narratives of revolution, revulsion and rearguard defense**

How far will the diverse momentums of Marikana pull South African society? Which political narratives are emerging, and can they become the basis for a social understanding that will mobilise the tens of millions of disgruntled South Africans into a force capable of breaking sweetheart relations between state, ruling party, labour aristocrats, parasitical capital and the London/Melbourne mining houses? The answer, so far, is not encouraging.

For some, this is potentially the breakthrough event that independent progressives have sought, so as to unveil the intrinsic anti-social tendencies associated with the ANC-Alliance's elite transition from revolutionaries to willing partners of some of the world's most wicked corporations. Such a narrative is promoted by the extremely fractured South African left, with some factions associated with the relatively broad-based (though labour-less) Democratic Left Front and the Marikana Support Campaign, which from Johannesburg and Cape Town have sponsored regular political meetings and solidaristic activities in the platinum belt.

Because the first such meeting at the University of Johannesburg a week after the Marikana Massacre provisionally included a NUM representative on the programme (though he was chased from the hall), another left faction led by Johannesburg's Khanya College broke away to found the 'We are all Marikana' campaign. Resolutely opposed to any legitimization of Cosatu's Alliance unionism, this network has also gathered ordinary workers for educational events. There are at least two other small revolutionary parties in Marikana engaged in recruiting and consciousness-raising: the Democratic Socialist Movement and

the Committee for a Workers' International. Unfortunately, even though it may often seem like a 'pre-revolutionary' situation in a South Africa with amongst the highest protest rates in the world, the lack of connectivity between those with grievances is a crippling problem.

That is why it is worrisome to hear dissonant narratives from others who might potentially move together into, at the very least, a more united oppositional discursive mode, not to mention joint activist initiatives. One of these might have included coordinated international solidarity, which became a huge void in Marikana-reaction work given the willingness of NGOs to already call on the World Bank to divest from Lonmin the day after the massacre, and given that at least a dozen spontaneous protests broke out at SA embassies and consulate offices across the world in subsequent days.



*CT solidarity protest, Marikane Support Committee, We are all Marikana, Tribe of Moles*

To illustrate, although an impressive revival of the Black Consciousness (BC) tradition has occurred over the last decade through the *New Frank Talk* series, for example, the sole public intervention on Marikana by the September National Imbizo was to visit two days after the massacre to begin the reconstruction of events (resulting in their later accusations against others who arrived soon after, of political plagiarism), but without subsequent commentary or activism. A month after the massacre, I witnessed BC adherents along with an unusually subdued left-autonomist network conjoined in an intellectual conference at Johannesburg's Wits University, in an event known as the 'Tribe of Moles', led by an emerging black intelligentsia suspicious of classical socialist formulations and friendly to insurgent opportunities. But surprisingly, in a whole day of debating race, representation and radical politics, the word Marikana was not mentioned once from the stage or floor. When asked during a break about the evolving situation, including Marikana women's organising, the country's most prominent BC proponent, Andile Mngxitama, called the cross-racial/class/geographical gender organizing underway (including middle-class women from NGOs) a distraction, for after all the corpses were 'black bodies' – and hence he gave impetus to the frequent claim that contemporary South African BC argumentation soon degenerates into race essentialism.

There is hope that women of Marikana organising across the divides of labour and community can set the example so desperately needed to connect the dots elsewhere in the society, including in nearby terrains ranging from mining dorpiets to land struggles in North West, Limpopo and Gauteng provinces. Yet these women are as diverse (and ethnically divided) as the broader society: wives, girlfriends, mothers, daughters, sisters, healthworkers, educators, sexworkers, cooks, cleaners, salespersons. In two cases, there are even women serving as superexploitative mining house managers (Cynthia Carroll of Anglo and Mamphela Ramphele of Goldfields: capitalist ideologues who have provided very little in the way of sisterhood, though at least the former World Bank managing director Ramphele did acknowledge that migrant labour needs a rethink). These women have the additional burdens of handling trauma counseling for victims of violence, and of providing mutual aid to those who are suffering enormously, directly and indirectly, as a result of the wildcat strike wave's reduction of immediate cash in communities.

What about progressives who have long been associated with the ANC because of the 100-year old party's best instincts, but who after 1994 continued their sincerely liberatory work mainly from civil society? Here one might include organisations which jumped into the Marikana political breach with much needed support activities, including the Socio-Economic Rights Institute, Sonke Gender Justice, Studies in Poverty and Inequality, Students for Law and Social Justice, the Treatment Action Campaign and Section 27 (which is named after the country's Bill of Rights).

A leader of the latter very vigorous NGO, Mark Heywood (formerly a leading AIDS-medicines activist), was on the one hand a vital supplier of solidarity, yet on the other, perhaps a victim of his own belief in liberal *muti* (traditional medicine), when speaking to the Marikana workers and community in late September: 'The Constitution of South Africa is the most important weapon we have. It is more powerful than Jacob Zuma, but it will only give you power if you organise around the Constitution, if you organise around its

rights.’ Shown this quote, one leading left intellectual chuckled, ‘I don’t think the workers won their 22 percent raise with a second thought about the Constitution.’

And what of the official ‘left’? Nothing if not brutally frank, *Business Day* newspaper editor Peter Bruce wrote four days after the massacre, ‘What’s scary about Marikana is that, for the first time, for me, the fact that the ANC and its government do not have the handle they once did on the African majority has come home. The party is already losing the middle classes. If they are now also losing the marginal and the dispossessed, what is left? Ah yes, Cosatu and the communists – Zuma’s creditors.’

Indeed it is surreal to find Cosatu and communist leaders so racked with anxiety at the prospect of widening worker revolt. In the most extreme case, an SACP ideologue was used by controversy-seeking liberal journalist RW Johnson as the useful idiot for a bizarre conclusion: ‘*this time the Left was in favour of the massacre* [emphasis added]. Dominic Tweedie of the Communist University, Johannesburg, commented “This was no massacre, this was a battle. The police used their weapons in exactly the way they were supposed to. That’s what they have them for. The people they shot didn’t look like workers to me. We should be happy. The police were admirable.” The Communist Party’s North West section demanded the arrest of AMCU’s Joseph Muthunjwa and his deputy, James Kholelile.’

Johnson, a regular *London Review of Books* blogger, has apparently no interest in engaging a genuine Left, and indeed he confesses that he taught ‘vulgar Marxism’ to Zuma in Durban fifty years ago (obviously rather poorly). Yet his point about SACP inclinations to put the dissenters up against the wall is chillingly familiar.

If dismissing the courage and persistence of Marikana workers is the objective, then the partner in crime of both gleeful old-line liberalism and control-freak stalinism is nihilism, as represented in an *Africa Report* article by maverick commentator Heinrich Bohmke, well known in Durban as a political kill-joy with an eloquent spear of a pen. Writing six days after the massacre, Bohmke predicted, ‘the repertoire of counter-insurgency (for lack of a softer term) available to those working on behalf of the *status quo* is too great to allow much to come of Marikana... Bosses of all hues will consider this a boon. Instead of menace and the hope for an upsurge in struggle, what Marikana may end up marking is the beginning of a tripartite backlash against what government, established trade unions and business have all called “anarchy”.’

How wrong can you get. The panic of bosses and their spokespeople – neoliberals such as Bruce – is easy to discern, at a time social protest in townships reached very high levels in mid-2012, with no hope of relief. Some commentators apparently fearing the potentially uncontrollable contagion of disrespect, like Frans Cronje of the SA Institute of Race Relations, immediately rose to the ANC’s defense, declaring in mid-September, ‘A myth has taken hold in South Africa that service delivery was a failure.’ Cronje’s defense of state provision of water, electricity, housing, etc reverberated well with *Business Day* editorialists as well as SACP leader Blade Nzimande, who warmly endorsed the ‘research’.



But when I asked Cronje whether he had determined what percentage of post-1994 communal water taps were still working amongst those the ruling party claim serve more than fifteen million people, he conceded that he had no clue. The last serious audit I know of – a decade ago by David Hemson, at the behest of then water minister Ronnie Kasrils – put the share at less than half, using even the most generous definition of what is ‘working,’ and by all accounts the sector’s management has degenerated since then.

Others in this apparently frightened camp, like *Business Day* columnist Steven Friedman, appeal for a return to a ‘social partnership’ strategy in the wake of Marikana, because such an approach ‘has not failed us – it has not been tried.’ The corporatist elites, now including Vavi, did meet in mid-October, issuing what will be soon seen as meaningless statements against wildcat strikes and worker violence against scabs. The big business representatives at that gabfest were apparently loathe to even name themselves publicly.

### **Economic potholes ahead**

Unfortunately for them, no matter the narratives of renewed social ‘leadership’, the strike wave may continue rising if desperation levels and worker militancy continue. Truck drivers received an above-inflation settlement on October 12 after resorting to sometimes intensely violent methods to disrupt scab drivers, in the process creating shortages of petrol and retail goods in parts of the country. If municipal workers go on strike next, the piling up of garbage and then its spillage on main roads – the typical tactic to infuriate wealthier residents so as to compel local government officials to settle – will add to the impression that South Africa has won amongst world capitalists: socio-economic rot and an inability to control the unruly proletariat.

In mid-September, the World Economic Forum’s *Global Competitiveness Report* placed South Africa in the number one position for adverse employee-employer relations (in a survey done prior to Marikana), whereas last year in this measure of class struggle, South African workers were only in 7<sup>th</sup> place of 144 countries surveyed. Partly as a result of labour militancy, major ratings agencies are now downgrading the country’s bond rating, most recently to BBB level by Standard & Poor’s. The resulting higher interest rates to be paid on the country’s prolific foreign borrowings – about five times higher today in absolute terms than inherited from apartheid in 1994 – will create yet more fiscal pressures as well as household and corporate repayment stress.

Given Europe’s crisis and South Africa’s vulnerability, much lower GDP growth rates in coming quarters are anticipated. And instead of countering that prospect with an interest rate cut by the SA Reserve Bank in coming weeks, as was projected just weeks ago, the country’s shaky financial standing will put countervailing upward pressure on rates. A rates increase is possible, just so as to stem rampant capital flight, even while Citigroup’s long-planned inclusion of SA securities in its global state bond reporting portfolio expands the purchasing base for Pretoria’s bonds. The only soothing answer for bankers from the finance minister, former communist Pravin Gordhan, is to hint at fiscal austerity in his upcoming budget speech.

All this is to say that the situation remains too fluid to assess which forces will emerge from the chaos. It is here that contemporary South African narratives from within 'nationalism', 'populism', 'stalinism', 'trotskyism', 'autonomism', 'black consciousness', 'feminism', 'nihilism', 'corporatism', 'liberalism' and 'neoliberalism' all appear inadequate to the tasks at hand on the platinum belt and so many other workplaces and communities. No ideologues have yet posed a vision to rescue South Africa from intense pressures that seem to grow stronger each week.

What is definitive, though, is the waning of any remaining illusions that the forces of 'liberation' led by the ANC will take South Africa to genuine freedom and a new society. Marikana will have that effect, permanently, I suspect, so long as protesters keep dodging police bullets and moving the socio-economic and political-ecological questions to centre stage, from where ANC neoliberal nationalism could either arrange a properly fascist backlash, or more likely under Zuma's ongoing misrule, continue shrinking in confusion and regular doses of necessary humility.

*(Patrick Bond directs the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society in Durban.)*

